

WILDLIFE HAZARDS WORKING GROUP

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B. Eagle Nest Removal: Chair Zimmerman said he had reviewed notes and minutes of past Airport Board and WHWG meetings: On December 9, 2009, the Board considered applying for a permit. At that meeting the Board recommended that the Manager apply for an eagle nest removal permit but that no action be taken until the specific proposed action is brought before the Board for its consideration. In the Board's April 2010 meeting, this issue was on the agenda and public testimony was taken. At its May 10, 2010, meeting, the WHWG discussed the nest removal issue but was unable to determine if it was safer to have a pair of habituated eagles in the area or if it is safer to have no eagles at all. There was no consensus because the impact of such a decision was unknown. Therefore, the possibility of a research project to determine the impact of the eagle nest removal was discussed.

On May 12, 2009, the Board had a lengthy discussion on what the WHWG had discussed. On September 22, 2010, the WHWG had another discussion about the eagle nest issue and what types of studies should be done by the Fish & Wildlife Services to evaluate the impact of the nest removal. Fish & Wildlife personnel said they were looking for a partnership between themselves, DOT, and several airports in the state. They described the three parts of a proposed study that would include satellite tags. During the October 13, 2010 Board meeting, the Manager had proposed that the Board consider approving the eagle nest removal permit--but no action was taken at that meeting because the permit had just been received and the termination date of the permit was a bit of a concern. At the November 10, 2010, Board meeting, the Board passed a resolution, following a long discussion, and accepted the permit after adding some considerations regarding how the permit would be utilized with respect to taking only part of the tree.

Nick Borchert said written authorization from Alaska Department of Fish & Game is the last necessary part. Verbal authorization was given, but the written authorization was delayed because of the new Governor's election, which has had a trickle down effect on a number of issues. He had been assured that Fish & Game would not fight the nest removal, but they are trying to figure out the process.

Laurie Craig said she opposed the nest removal and felt it was unnecessary. She wanted to know more about the study that is supposed to occur because of the removal. Airport Manager Jeannie Johnson said that at the Board's November meeting, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife representative had been in favor of taking the nest now. The GPS tags are on order and they felt that it would be timely to take it now rather than wait and risk the fact that we would go through another season with the eagles on the nest. Mr. Borchert said the nest would not be used to capture the eagles, but rather the nest area will be used to determine the pair for the study.

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Ms. Johnson said that the reason this nest is being removed is because Juneau International Airport received a letter from Mr. Borchert's predecessor about this nest and how he felt it was a safety issue. In the last certification inspection, the FAA Certification Inspector wrote a letter of correction to Juneau International Airport about removing the nest. This is a safety issue, with which the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service agrees. In the beginning the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service was going to require mitigation but they have agreed that the study is the Airport's mitigation. This will be a joint effort to make it the best we can for everything at the airport.

C. Historical Review and Discussion of Safety Issues – Past and Present – in the Airport Area by Bob Armstrong and Nick Borchert: Bob Armstrong said he has had a concern for many years about 500 to 700 Vancouver Canada geese that are resident birds. They feed on the Mendenhall Wetlands in the winter and spring and probably nest on Admiralty Island. They return in the fall to the wetlands. Another thing that has always occurred is that during hunting season, they typically take off and go some place else and then come back to the wetlands and feed at night. In recent years, mallards are starting to follow these birds. The tagging studies have shown that the birds that are here in the fall or winter are not the ones that nest here. In 2001, he noticed that when the geese took off in the morning, they were flying to Auke Lake. He had not noticed this in prior years – it had been Colt Island. What concerned him was that the birds fly directly across the approach and departure of jets on the northwestern runway. He observed what he thought were near misses of 500+ birds and aircraft. Because he thought this was a significant hazard, he informed the FAA and talked to the people in charge of the Airport's EIS. He never heard anything back.

When the hot spot study was done in 2002, Auke Lake was added as an observation area. It was well documented in 2002 and 2003 that the birds spend the day on Auke Lake and fly back to the wetlands in the evening and back to Auke Lake in the morning. Since then, he has generally observed the area and is convinced that this continues to happen. He spoke to someone recently who said that since hunting season began, the birds have been spending the day on the lake. There are also 500 to 1,000 mallards doing the same thing. Laurie Craig said the birds do not fly all at once. She felt this was a legitimate concern as they fly through the cut.

Airport M&O Superintendent Jerry Mahle said this is something they deal with on a regular basis. He said the Airport is the middle of a corridor and the majority of large flocks are migratory birds. The FAA's bottom line is zero birds around the airport, but everyone knows that will never happen. The Airport hired experts to determine if an incident occurs, who will be there to protect the rights of the Airport to show that it has done the best they could to protect the flying public. Ms. Craig asked if there was any type of equipment that would alert pilots to the hazard. Mr. Mahle said bird radar and whether scare systems would work in Juneau was discussed with the FAA earlier in the

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day. The Airport will use the latest technology to insure the public is as safe as possible. Ms. Johnson said that the Tower notifies pilots when they are aware of birds in the area.

Nick Borchert said that his agency performs wildlife hazard assessments. If a study is needed, a second person (specialist) would need to be hired to do the study. The geese fly across the runway. The birds' departure from the wetlands occurs after the first shot, either from a hunter or Mr. Borchert's guns. The predictability of the time is a management tool as is actual physical dispersal from the areas. It is known that the birds will not be moved from the wetlands as it is a food and water source. By utilizing the predictability, the Tower can be contacted if any type of flights are observed. When the geese are crossing the runway, they are there for a matter of seconds. Mr. Borchert said there is an avian radar unit at Sea-Tac Airport. The system costs \$750,000 dollars and requires on-site staff to interpret the data. This system does not go through trees, which means it would have to be higher. It seems this system is not feasible at this time. Mr. Borchert said that Alaska Airlines had discussed equipping their aircraft with an avian "dissuader" radar, which would push birds out of their path.

An idea was noted to remove trees around the ponds off of Fish Creek and do some enhancements which would make geese comfortable. Other enhancements would include closing it to hunting and dogs, with certain habitat manipulations. There would still be flights between the refuge and Fish Creek, but they would not be right over the runway. This would be a modification only and would not take care of all birds. As both of these ponds are within five miles of the airport, it would require FAA approval. Mr. Mahle said that this type of modification had been tried before and it had actually increased the birds in the area. Chair Zimmerman said that this area is bordered by the Bayview Subdivision and it would be difficult to keep dogs out of the area.

When asked if a study would help, Mr. Borchert said it could not hurt. He said his organization has programs at Anchorage International and Elmendorf Air Force Base where they are on-site 24/7. If the funding was available, an extra person for an hour before and an hour after daylight hours would help, which would be one and one-half people in the wintertime and as many as three is in the summer time. He said it is always advantageous to have more people. Mr. Borchert asked the feasibility of pushing the geese off of Auke Lake at a set time, which would make it more predictable.

Chair Zimmerman said that it would be good if the group get to some sense that could be taken to the Board -- perhaps to advocate for more people from Mr. Borchert's group during hunting season to study the problem. Diana Thompson suggested using the University as she was there because she was using the eagles as a research project. She thought that other students might be interested in volunteering for studies. She noted there is a foundation called The Bald Eagle Foundation which provides \$19,000 per year for

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student projects research funding related to the eagles. It could be a source of reducing the cost of a study. Chair Zimmerman said he thought the group needed to get the information to take it further in terms of having a report, something concise and verifiable. Perhaps Ducks Unlimited could be contacted. Ms. Johnson said that Alaska Airlines should be approached for their suggestions on how they see Juneau International Airport. Do the pilots notice something in their path at certain times of the year? She said she would contact Lynae Craig at Alaska Airlines.

Chair Zimmerman said the group has identified a potential hazard. The sense of the group is that it probably needs to be studied to determine if it really is a hazard. If so, how might the hazard be reduced? Any study should involve not just the people studying the problem, but also the insight of pilots and other people involved. The next step would be how to do the study--if, in fact, that is the sense of the group. And then, how to get funding and how to advocate for the study. He thought that solid scientific evidence was needed and more research needs to be done.

Mr. Borchert said this sounded like something to be tabled by the group. Items to be discussed include funding, personnel, the goals from the study, and time of year. He said the hunting year was nearly over and it would need to be done next year. Ms. Johnson agreed with Mr. Borchert's suggestion. She thought this was not solidified enough to take to the Board. She said that at some point in time, Mr. Zimmerman as the Chair will need to bring to the Board whatever the committee decides to do. Again, she is very interested in hearing from Alaska Airlines about their view of the safety issue at Juneau International Airport on these birds. We know they are very concerned about the eagles, but nothing has been heard from them about the ducks. Mr. Borchert noted that this might be a threat that is not a threat. He personally would like to see meetings in a less formal setting, if possible, to further discuss the issue. Ms. Johnson said that the Public Meetings Act must be adhered to. Information can be distributed, but any agreement must be done in a public forum. Chair Zimmerman said that theoretically, Nick could take the minutes of this meeting to someone in Sandusky, Ohio, to see if there is anything that could be done. Ms. Johnson said he could then bring any ideas or suggestions back to the committee. Mr. Borchert said he would take it to his contact in Sandusky and after his conversation with that person, he can let the Chair know what he found out. Mr. Borchert could see hunter surveys, visualization within the refuge itself, questions like weather, tide-high and low values, and the time of the tide change.

D. Proposed Topics for Future Meetings: Chair Zimmerman suggested the next meeting will be held between March 13 and 27, 2011.

IV. ADJOURN: The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.